

Attachment to Fact Sheet for the Proposed Communicable Disease Act of 2007

There is a need to update the current city ordinance (Chapter 8.16) to incorporate more accurate and complete disease reporting requirements in agreement with state statutes, to correct or modernize language, titles and reporting procedures, and to more clearly define the processes associated with the reporting of and control of communicable and contagious diseases in 2007. The current ordinance was last updated in 1990. Since then the list of communicable diseases has expanded considerably as has the ability to test for diseases and the means of reporting. In addition, the “Nebraska State Department of Health” is no longer the proper term, other state and local laws exist to deal with school exclusion, and isolation and quarantine are not practices that have been employed frequently despite their historical use in controlling outbreaks in the 1940s and earlier. The proposed ordinance is meant to improve on the weaknesses of the current ordinance and reflect current terminology, practices and procedures.

Specifically, the current City ordinance, Chapter 8.16, is primarily directed at the reporting of sexually transmitted diseases and childhood illnesses or diseases, whereas the proposed ordinance emphasizes the reporting of all diseases, including all infectious, communicable or contagious diseases that may pose as a threat to public health. Among other things, the proposed ordinance: 1) more clearly defines terms, 2) ties directly to the complete list of reportable diseases as specified in state statute and regulations (Title 173 of the Nebraska Administrative Code), and 3) delineates the steps and processes related to isolation and quarantine.

After defining terms, the proposed ordinance more clearly elaborates the local authority to require reporting of a host of communicable diseases and how they should be reported to the Health Department. It allows the Health Director to address the reporting of newly emerging diseases should one appear suddenly and require immediate action, perhaps even before the state regulations are modified.

The proposed ordinance more clearly defines the processes (isolation and quarantine) that may be implemented to control or contain the spread of diseases that may pose a significant public health threat. While the Health Director already has broad powers to isolate or quarantine individuals, that process is not defined; nor is the Health Department’s role in addressing communicable disease outbreaks. Importantly, the proposed ordinance more clearly states that the Health Director should implement only the least restrictive measures necessary to limit the impact of diseases that pose as a potential threat to the community.